New Plan for School Construction

Department of Education

News Releases

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The Nova Scotia government announced today its new plan for school construction. It will deliver 17 new schools over the next four years, without public-private partnerships or P3.

Consistent with government commitments, schools will be built based on new design standards that focus on educational needs, instead of costly extras. The re-establishment of the non-partisan School Capital Construction Committee will also set priorities based on the highest need for renovations and school construction projects not yet on the list.

"Students need new schools, and we will build them, but not the way they were built in the past," Education Minister Jane Purves said. "The former government used P3 as a blank cheque, and the P3 schools grew too elaborate and costly."

"Our plan is to build great schools for students, at a cost taxpayers can afford," she added. "It is not only the responsible thing to do, it is the only way to start meeting the needs that are out there."

Private companies will design and build schools, but school boards will operate and own the schools. The province will set budgets, standards, and arrange financing.

Finance Minister Neil LeBlanc said the province's new accounting principles mean P3 and traditional financing have the same impact on the budget, and in turn, construction schedules.

"The former government tried to use accounting to push the costs of the new schools off-book, but they didn't fool our lenders or taxpayers. Debt is debt is debt, and we must account for it," he said.

"The new accounting principles are also good news for children and communities awaiting schools. Because the costs of the new schools are amortized, we can still pay for the schools over time, and build them on a reasonable schedule. Everyone understands the need to control costs wherever possible."

Mr. LeBlanc said the need for cost control is clear, when originally-generous budgets for P3 schools were allowed to grow by another $32 million after budgets were signed and contracts set by the former government. The extras are largely due to last-minute design changes and unmanaged site development costs.

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"Too many children and communities are awaiting new schools," Mr. LeBlanc said. "When you think $32 million would build three of those schools, it's hard not to get angry."

"There was little or no consideration of cost when school sites were selected and little or no cost controls after decisions were made," Ms. Purves said. "If we're spending too much money for sewers and sidewalks that's money taken away from the schools. It's unacceptable."

Municipalities will now be consulted before site decisions are finalized, so infrastructure costs are known. As well, land prices will be negotiated before sites are selected.

The School Capital Construction Committee, created in the early 1990's to take the politics out of school construction decisions, is being re-established. The committee's first responsibility will be to prioritize more than 40 renovation projects, promised in 1997, but without a budget or action plan. The goal is to set out a realistic time line for the most urgent renovations, like those in the Annapolis Valley, by fall.

Ms. Purves said Halifax Regional, and other school boards, also have needs, not yet on any list.

"I expect to bring forward a recommendation to cabinet on a plan for the Halifax Regional School Board very soon."

FOR BROADCAST USE:

The Nova Scotia government is promising to deliver 17 new schools over the next four years.

And Education Minister Jane Purves says it will be done without the P-3 formula.

Purves and Finance Minister Neil LeBlanc announced today the new plan for school construction.

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Contact: Cathy Shaw
Department of Education
902-424-3757
E-mail: shawcm@gov.ns.ca

NOTE TO EDITORS: The following is a list of the 17 schools and the scheduled opening dates.

Targeted Opening September 2001:

Elmsdale Elementary
École Petit-de-Grat
Chedabucto Place
École Ste.-Anne-du-Ruisseau
Clare P-12
Argyle P-12
Whycocomagh

Targeted Opening September 2002:

St. Anthony Daniel Elementary
South Colchester High
École Pomquet
East Pictou High

Targeted Opening September 2003:

Sydney Elementary
West Pictou High

Targeted Opening September 2004:

Amherst Elementary
Cumberland Elementary
Rankin Memorial
Shelburne Regional High

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